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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the concept of social indicators as ways of evaluating macro level adult education programs. In general social indicators deal with social factors which affect the quality of life of the population. Social scientists are recognizing the need for both economic and social indicators. Even as the need for social indicators is discussed, the problems which may be associated with their use (questions of measurement, the reduction of social indicators into economic terms, the definition of quality of life) are recognized. Typical social indicators include: health, public safety, education, employment, income, housing, leisure and recreation, and population. In assessing adult education programs with respect to social indicators, the time factor seems to be crucial. In a model evaluation the procedure moves from focusing on a social concern (one source of program objectives) to identifying appropriate social indicators, to collecting evidence, to comparing the evidence to the social indicators. As the program is judged and referred back to the social concern, the cycle starts again, presumably at a more advanced point in relation to the social concern. All adult educators need to work to establish evaluative procedures which attend to qualitative as well as quantitative aspects of program output. (JR)

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SOCIAL INDICATORS AND PROGRAM EVALUATION

by

Elizabeth Elliott

Adult educators are concerned with evaluating the impact of their programs on clientele and on society in general. Programs which have an economic impact are relatively easier to evaluate while programs which are intended to improve the quality of life are more difficult to evaluate. Many adult education programs, including those in family living education, may have both economic and non-economic impact. The economic impact can be measured in new skills that make persons more employable, help them save dollars in shopping or in home production. The non-economic, quality of life aspects such as better family relations, are harder to measure but they are identifiable. In a time when competition for program dollars is keen, it becomes increasingly important to devise methods of measuring the impact of programs of a social nature.

Although economic indicators are important and useful, social indicators are also needed. This paper will examine the concept of social indicators as a way to evaluate programs of a social nature. The need for indicators which will provide information on the state of our society in those areas not usually subject to quantitative measure will be explored. A variety of social indi-

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cators will be examined and problems relating to the use of indicators will be discussed. Finally, the role of selected social indicators in evaluating adult education programs in family living education will be explored.

SOCIAL INDICATORS DEFINED

The definition of the concept of social indicator varies, but there appears to be general agreement that a social indicator deals with social factors which affect the quality of life of the population. Bauer (1) says that social indicators are "statistics, statistical series, and all other forms of evidence that enable us to assess where we stand and are going with respect to our values and goals and to evaluate specific programs and determine their impact."

Another source defines social indicators as "social statistics which reflect the quality of life and measure the extent of social problems" (2) Stolte-Heiskanen (3) says the basic underlying principle of social indicators is to describe how the population lives and what measures can be, or are being taken, to improve the level of living or the "quality of life." Thus, she says, social indicators are primarily tools for describing the state of societal welfare and the factors affecting it, with the ultimate purpose of these descriptions serving as a basis for social policy effecting the observed changes.

These definitions all recognize that the quality of life of the people affected by social problems needs to be assessed against the normative goals or values of the society. A social indicators system operates within the recognized values, against which defined areas of need are assessed. The parameters of value and need are anticipated to be ongoing.

WHY SOCIAL INDICATORS

A growing number of social scientists are recognizing the need for both economic and social indicators. There is concern that in many areas in which social critics pass judgment and in which policies are made, there are no yardsticks to use in determining whether things are getting better or worse.

As I reviewed literature dealing with social indicators I did not find reference made to social indicators and evaluation of adult education programs. It seems to me that the need for social indicators which can be used to assess quality of life is as great in adult education as in other parts of society. We need to be able to discuss the outcomes of our programs with the public and with funding agencies in terms that are meaningful to them. As we examine in the following section, what other social scientists have said about the need for social indicators we need to consider whether social indicators can be related to adult education programs dealing with quality of life.

Bauer and Gross, who have given leadership to the discussion of the concept of social indicators, are educators who have been involved with a variety of government projects, including a National Aeronautics and Space Administration project. Bauer (1) states:

> "The proposal for social indicators suggests that our highly developed national system of economic indicators, which allows us to measure the state of our economy in considerable detail, needs to be supplemented by an equivalent set of indicators that will provide us with information on the state of our society in those areas not usually subject to quantitative measurement or within the professional domain of the economist."

Gross (4) elaborates on the need for more than economic indicators. He says:

> "In addition to economic aspects, every situation has political, social, cultural, and biophysical aspects. Moreover, qualitative information may be fully as important as quantitative information. Overemphasis on statistics, because they may seem more precise, or upon economic data, because they may be more readily available, often yields a narrow or unbalanced view of a nation."

Foa and Foa (5) write about the growing interest in non-economic components of human well-being. They say that it is only recently that the problem of defining and measuring the non-economic components in the quality of life has begun to receive scientific attention. There seems to be growing awareness that gross national happiness includes variables which are not covered by the gross national product.

The fact that economic and non-economic or social indicators are linked, and that you cannot have complete information on any situation until data from both areas are considered is being recognized at several levels of government and in society in general. In the 90th congress, Senators Mondale and Harris introduced "The Full Opportunity and Social Accounting Act" which calls for the creation of a council of social advisors, a social report from the president, and a joint committee on the social report. This would parallel the Council of Economic Advisors, the economic report to the nation and the Joint Economic Committee. The bill has been introduced in 2 consecutive sessions of congress. In 1973, the office of Management and Budget prepared Social Indicators 1973 (6), the first of its kind to be published by the federal government.

According to Gross and Springer (7) the social indicator concept has been given impetus at the government level by: (1) the growing awareness of the contributions and limitations of economic information; (2) the implementation of the Planning - Programming - Budgeting System within the federal government; and (3) specific proposals for increased utilization of social information, such as the Mondale-Harris proposed legislation.

Toffler (8) says that a sensitive system of indicators geared to measuring the achievement of social and cultural goals, and integrated with economic indicators,

is part of the technical equipment that any society needs before it can reach the next stage of eco-technological development. He further states:

> "Through economic indicators we gauge the overall health of the economy..... without these measures our control of the economy would be far less effective. By contrast, we have no such measures, no set of comparable "social indicators" to tell us whether the society, as distinct from the economy, is also healthy. We have no measures of the "quality of life." We have no systematic indices to tell us whether men are more or less alienated from one another, whether education is more effective, whether art, music, and literature are flourishing, whether civility, generosity or kindness are increasing."

Even as the need for social indicators is discussed, the problems which may be associated with their use are recognized. Much attention is being given to the discussion of measurement. Some question how you can quantify qualitative data. Others are questioning whether it is appropriate to quantify qualitative data or whether attention should be given to formulating appropriate qualitative measures. The mistake should not be made of attempting to convert ordinal data into ratio data. When questions are raised about the validity of qualitative measures it is well to remember that there are validity problems with quantitative measures, too.

I would argue that we should not try to translate all social indicators into economic terms because values are often changed in the process. When we try to reduce everything to its dollar value the result is often alienation and violence. Etzioni and Lehman (9) mention the danger of measuring means rather than goals. They say that the means used by social units to attain their goals are more easily measured than the goals themselves - goals tend to be more intangible than means, thus more difficult to measure. This is often a problem in adult education.

Another concern in the use of social indicators is how to define quality of life. What items or social indicators are critical to quality of life? Do we accept the quality of life definition of a government agency or of a citizen planning

group in a local community? Or do we have to settle on a compromise? Clearly, this is a value question and the values of the group defining quality of life will affect the definition.

If agreement can be reached on social indicators to use to measure quality of life, then the question of criteria arises. What evidence will be used to make judgments about the degree to which social indicators are being met?

Changes in social indicators develop over time. Thus in order to measure change, data will have to be collected over a period of time. There will also be a need for longitudinal data. It will be difficult to use social indicators to assess the short term impact of programs designed to influence the quality of life.

Bauer (1) Stolte-Heiskanen (3) Gross and Springer (7) and Foa and Foa (10) all discuss the problems incurred with the social indicator concept and the importance of trying to overcome the problems and implement the concept. Francis (11) takes a more pessimistic view of the use of social indicators.

It is well to be aware of the problems associated with the use of social indicators as we examine social indicators appropriate for use in evaluating quality of life programs.

WHICH SOCIAL INDICATORS

Even though the concept of social indicators is relatively new, numerous lists of indicators have been generated. Stolte-Heiskanen (3), Foa and Foa (5,10), Micklin (12), Hafstrom and Duning (13), and Sheldon and Moore (14) explore a variety of indicators. Gross and Springer (7,15) have compiled a list of indicator categories and in 2 issues of The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science a social scientist has dealt in detail with each suggested indicator.

At the 1971 White House Conference on Children and Youth (16) the need for national quality of life measurements was discussed and areas of social and individual concern were proposed.

Many of the indicators identified by the authors mentioned above might have some use in evaluating adult education programs but I would like to examine in more detail 2 other sources which I believe have particular relevance to family living education programs.

The Division on Aging and the Division of Family Services in the Department of Health and Social Services in the State of Wisconsin have identified a group of social indicators to be used to assess the social status of the elderly in Wisconsin (17). They specified 6 indicators and devised a series of questions to measure the objective and subjective components of each indicator. The indicators identified are:

- Economic well-being
- Housing
- Health
- Social Relations and Activities
- Independence
- Life Satisfaction

These are really categories of indicators, drawn from the total life situations of a specific group, the elderly. For each of these categories, specific indicators are needed. In the health area, availability of health care facilities, medical doctor/population ratio, percentage of population covered by health insurance, death rate due to accidents, heart attack, cancer, daily caloric intake, food consumption patterns would all need to be examined, in terms of the elderly population. If we were to identify health indicators to be used with the general population in addition to those listed above the infant death

rate, degree of obesity, and incidence of venereal disease should be considered. This list is presented as an example and is not intended to be exhaustive.

There are similarities between the Wisconsin indicators and those developed by the Office of Management and Budget (6). They identified 8 broad categories and within each category social concerns have been identified. They have supplied statistical data on each of the Social concerns. These data are called social indicators. The categories and the concerns identified are:

HEALTH - Long life, life free of disability, and access to medical care.

PUBLIC SAFETY - Safety of life and property from crime.

EDUCATION - Basic skills attainment, basic skills achievement, higher and continuing education.

EMPLOYMENT - Employment opportunities, quality of employment life.

INCOME - Level of income, distribution of income, expenditure of income - the low income population.

HOUSING - Housing quality.

LEISURE AND RECREATION - Leisure time.

POPULATION - Population growth, population distribution.

In the health area, under long life, they examine infant mortailty rate, life expectancy at birth, life remaining at ages 30 and 50, death rates, death rates for selected causes, and death rates ranked for four leading causes.

The range of possible models is great. The problem now is to develop a model which might be used in evaluating adult education programs, and specifically programs in family living education.

USING SOCIAL INDICATORS IN PROGRAM EVALUATION

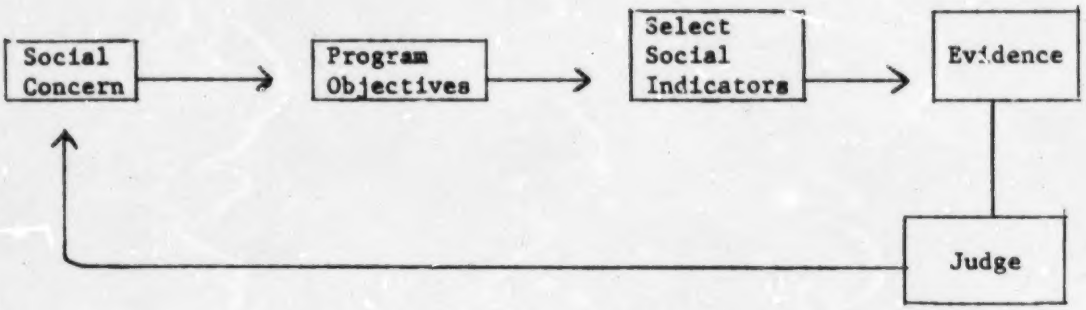
In this discussion, relating social indicators to program evaluation, I am referring to macro level evaluation rather than individual project evaluation. I am assuming that in educational programs conducted over a period of time, a change may be effected in social indicators.

In considering the application of the social indicator concept to the evaluation of adult education programs we need to be cognizant of the problems mentioned earlier. In addition to attending to the values, measurement and criteria problems, attention needs to be given to the selection of indicators which are appropriate to the program. It is hardly appropriate to use employment indicators to assess the value of a parent education program, yet it must be recognized that employment indicators may affect the quality of parenting. Attention will somehow need to be given to both.

The time factor appears to be crucial. Since many of the social indicators have a degree of generality, changes in the situation will require a long period of time. It is not feasible to attempt to use the social indicator concept to show change with a short-term effort. It is difficult to predict long term or permanent behavior changes from the short term indicators revealed by an ongoing or just completed program. The time factor presents another problem. If you are going to try to show change in social indicators over time, then program objectives will need to remain fairly constant. The other alternative would be to state the objectives broadly enough so that changing program efforts might still be related.

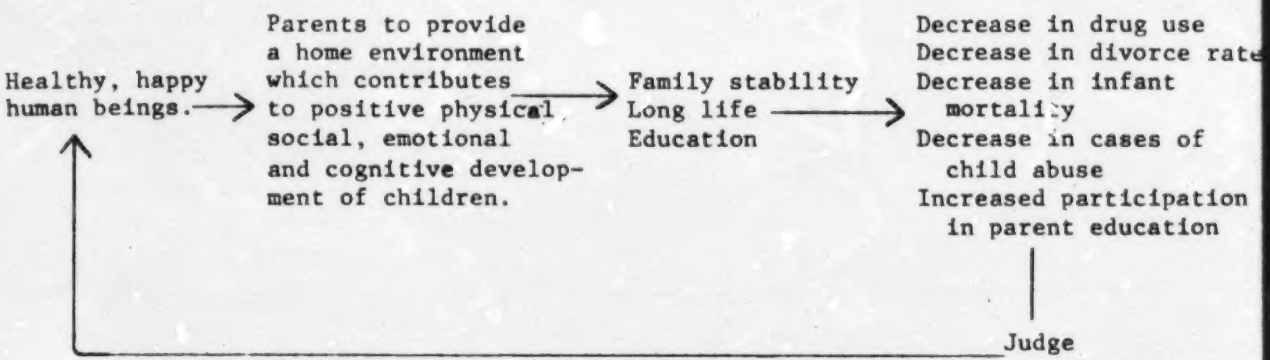
After particular social indicators are selected, it will be necessary to decide on which measures, both objective and subjective, and which criteria are to be used.

Schematically, the application of the social indicator concept to program evaluation might look like this:



This model focuses on social concerns as one source of program objectives. After program objectives are determined, the appropriate social indicators are identified. As the program is conducted over an extended period of time, evidence is collected which is compared to the social indicators and a judgment is made. I recognized that this is only one aspect of evaluation. I am assuming that program evaluators will continue to evaluate program inputs and intended and observed outcomes as appropriate.

In using the model to evaluate a parent educational program it would include the following:


Healthy, happy human beings.
Parents to provide a home environment which contributes to positive physical social, emotional and cognitive development of children.
Family stability
Long life
Education
Decrease in drug use
Decrease in divorce rate
Decrease in infant mortality
Decrease in cases of child abuse
Increased participation in parent education
Judge

As a program is judged and you refer back to the social concern, to start the cycle again, if the program has been successful in affecting some social indicators, you would start at a different point in relation to the social concern -- you wouldn't always be starting at the same point. And as the process is repeated, the indicators will change as the emphasis on the concern changes.

FINALLY

This rather cursory exploration of social indicators and program evaluation in quality of living or family life education programs has raised more questions than it has answered. Adult education program administrators, program planners, implementers and evaluators need to give continued attention to this issue and begin to establish evaluative procedures which attend to qualitative as well as quantitative aspects of program output.

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